

WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

1. A method for automatically updating a printer driver on a computer comprising the steps of:

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(A) contacting a remote network location;

(B) comparing a first version of the printer driver installed on the computer with a second version stored at the remote network location;

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(C) downloading and installing the printer driver from the remote location onto the computer if it is a more recent version of the printer driver than one currently installed on the computer; and

(D) uninstalling the version of the printer driver previously stored on the computer.

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2. A method according to claim 1 in which the comparing step includes querying the second version of the driver by reading from the initialization file of the second version to determine its version.

3. A method according to claim 1 in which each step is performed at a designated time or upon the occurrence of a designated event without prompting by the computer user.

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4. A method according to claim 1 in which the second version is stored at a location a system administrator can control which versions of printer drivers are stored there.

5. A method according to claim 1 in which the level of user interaction required in the updating process can be varied.

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6. A method according to claim 1 in which the steps are performed without cessation or interruption of the computer system or its programs during the execution of the steps.

7. A computer system containing a software module that allows a printer driver stored on the computer system to be automatically updated, in which the software module

(A) contacts a specified remote network location at which a second version of the printer driver is stored;

(B) determines the version of a printer driver stored at the remote location;

(C) compares the installed version of the printer driver with the version stored at the remote location;

(D) downloads and installs on the computer system the version of the printer driver stored at the remote location if it is a newer version than the version currently installed on the computer system; and

(E) uninstalls the previous version of the printer driver from the computer system.

8. The computer system of claim 7 wherein the software module is a program subroutine of the printer driver.

9. The computer system of claim 7 wherein the new printer driver can be downloaded and installed without cessation or interruption of the computer system or its programs during its execution.

10. The computer system of claim 7 wherein the software module is part of an install/upgrade application distinct from the printer driver.

